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At the December 7, 2000 Marine Fisheries Commission meeting, the Commission took action on a number of issues. These actions will become effective on December 21, 2000.

(1) Striped bass changes for 2001.

(A) Elimination of the requirement that all authorized striped bass dealers affix tags to each striped bass at first purchase and.

DMF evaluated the dealer tagging program after one year and determined that the administrative burden on the agency to implement a comprehensive dealer tag program does not outweigh enforcement and compliance benefits. DMF will continue to provide assistance to Massachusetts dealers that intend to ship bass to such states. Also, we will continue to require that bass shipped to Massachusetts during the December-March period be tagged to indicate point of origin.

(B) Minimum size lowered for recreational fishermen from 30 inches to 28 inches

DMR recommended this change given that there are limited conservation benefits associated with maintaining a 30-inch minimum, updated assessment data indicate fishery performance is within FMP guidelines and there is favorable support from some large Massachusetts sporting organizations. This size limit is expected to remain in place for two years (through 2002) until Striped Bass Amendment 6 is completed.

(C) Final regulations prohibiting striped bass "high-grading" approved in September were filed.

"High-grading" where smaller legal-sized fish previously captured and retained are then discarded in favor of another larger legal-sized fish. Recreational fishermen may not retain a legal-sized striped bass and release said fish in favor of another larger legal-sized striped bass captured subsequently. Any legal-sized fish not immediately released into the water and held by stringer, live-well or another means shall be considered intent to high-grade.

(2) Scup and Black Sea Bass.

(a) Scup recreational possession limit lowered from 50 fish/angler and 200/vessel to 25/angler and 100/vessel.

(b) Commercial trip limits were enacted to comply with interstate and federal management plan. For scup, January 1 – April 30 scup commercial trip limit of 10,000 pounds was approved with a provision that when 75% of the quota is projected to be landed, the possession limit will be dropped to 1,000 pounds. For the November-December period, the trip limit of 2,000 pounds. These fisheries are further restricted by strict closures that closed the scup offshore fisheries last winter and this past fall.

For black sea bass, four different seasonal trip limits were adopted :

1st quarter - 9,000 lbs; 2nd quarter - 1,500 lbs; 3rd quarter - 1,000 lbs; and 4th

quarter - 2,000 lbs. Furthermore, DMF will reduce the possession limit during each quarter by half when 50% of the quarterly quota is projected to be reached.

(3) Groundfish Closure extended. Hooking exempted.

The January groundfish closure in upper Cape Cod Bay and Massachusetts Bay that was recently enacted by federal regulators was approved by DMF for state waters permit holders (draggers and gillnetters). However, commercial codfish hooking is exempted during the month of January. Any fisherman who seeks to participate in this fishery must apply to DMF for authorization. The Director will limit the fishery to those who (a) held a valid Massachusetts commercial fishing permit during 2000; (b) fishermen must provide catch reports; (c) the fishery will be restricted to (hand gear or long line) and any bait fishing must use circle hooks and (d) the 400 lbs. cod trip limit will be maintained. Fishermen who hold a federal multi-species permit are reminded that current federal regulations prohibit participation in this state waters fishery.

(4) Right Whale Conservation Rules Amended.

Rules were clarified regarding fishing or abandoning of fixed gear that does not comply with the modifications to reduce risk of entanglement. These changes will enhance the compliance with the existing rules and facilitate the upcoming "ghost gear" cleanup program in Cape Cod Bay.

(5) Decision regarding "Whiting Area" closure to fixed gear postponed

DMF took emergency action in late September to prevent lobstermen from displacing trawlers in a portion of the Cape Cod Bay whiting area. The MFC postponed final action pending a meeting among fishery officials, lobstermen and draggers.